

Floor sessions of the Assembly and Senate and meetings of legislative committees are all open to the public. Visitor galleries for the Assembly and Senate are located on the third floor of the Capitol.

Watching your Legislature at work

The Assembly

The California Assembly has 80 Members, each serving two-year terms. The Assembly is presided over by the Speaker or a designated Member. Voting is conducted by electronic push buttons on each Legislator’s desk, with tally boards at the front of the chamber.

The Senate

The Senate is comprised of 40 Members serving staggered four-year terms. The President Pro Tempore is the chief officer of the Senate. Voting is conducted by voice roll call.

Committees

To give adequate consideration to the more than 6,000 bills introduced each two-year session, the Legislature does most of its work in committees. Each committee has responsibility for a specific area of policy (education, health, etc.).

A typical committee hearing will involve the presentation of a bill by its author and testimony by interested groups and citizens.

Joint Committees

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee is a bi-partisan committee with fourteen members, seven from each house. This committee has the authority to direct the state auditor to conduct audits of any publicly created entity in the state. The committee is the legislature’s “watch dog” for protecting taxpayer dollars from inefficiency in government.

Finding out what is happening when you are at the Capitol

Assembly and Senate Daily Files

The Daily File provides a listing of agendas for floor sessions and all committees. Files are available in the Legislative Bill Room in the basement of the Capitol. Floor session times are listed on the front cover and the bills of the agenda are listed under “third reading file.” Committee agendas list the bill number, author and subject matter.

Path of a Bill through the California State Legislature

Author

A Legislator sends the idea and the language for the bill to the Legislative Counsel where it is drafted into the actual bill. The drafted bill is returned to the Legislator for introduction.

If the author is a Senator, the bill is introduced at the Senate Desk; if an Assemblymember, at the Assembly Desk. The house in which the bill is introduced is known as the “parent house”.

First Reading Introduction

A bill’s first reading is when the Clerk reads the bill number, the name of the author, and the descriptive title of the bill before the Members of the house. The bill is then sent to the Office of State Printing. No bill may be acted upon until it has been in print for 30 days.

Committee Hearings

The bill then goes to the Senate or Assembly Rules Committee where it is assigned to the appropriate committee for its first hearing. Bills are assigned according to the nature of the issue they address. After passing all policy committees, bills that have an effect on the State Budget (“fiscal bills”) must also be heard by a fiscal committee. Senate bills are heard in the Senate Budget and fiscal Review Committee and Assembly bills are heard in the Appropriations Committee. You can speak “for” or “against” a bill at all committee hearings. Your letters of support or opposition are important and should be mailed to committee members before the bill is scheduled to be heard in committee. It takes a majority vote of the full committee membership for a bill to be approved and “passed out” of the committee.

Second and Third Reading

Bills passed by committees are read a second time in the parent house and then placed on file for third reading. When a bill is read the third time, it is explained to the full house by its author, discussed by the Members during floor debate, and voted on by a roll call vote. Bills that require an expenditure of state funds or are urgency bills (take effect immediately) require 27 votes in the Senate and 54 votes in the Assembly for passage. All other bills need 21 votes in the Senate and 41 votes in the Assembly to be passed. If a bill is defeated, the Member may seek reconsideration and another vote.

Repeat Process In Other House

Once the bill has been approved by the parent house, it proceeds through the second house where the same hearing and review procedure occurs. Citizen participation is repeated as the bill moves through the second house. If the bill is passed without amendments it proceeds directly to the Governor for approval.

Resolution of Differences

If a bill is amended in the second house, it is returned to the parent house to get agreement on the amendments (concurrence). If agreement cannot be reached, the bill moves to a two-house conference committee (three Members of the Assembly and three Members of the Senate) to resolve the differences. Conference committee hearings are open to the public and provide another opportunity for citizens to express their views, which can help Legislators arrive at a decision. If approved by the conference committee, the bill then goes to the Governor.

Governor

The Governor has three choices when a bill reaches his desk. He can sign it into law, allow it to become law without his signature, or veto it. Urgency measures take effect immediately after they are signed. Other bills usually become effective the following January 1st. A final and very important time for citizen participation in the bill process is when the bill reaches the Governor’s desk. Letters and phone calls received by the Governor’s office are taken into consideration when the Governor decides whether to sign or veto a bill. If the bill is vetoed, it is returned to the parent house where the author may ask for a vote to override the veto. It requires a two-thirds vote of both houses to override the Governor’s veto.



Questions and Answers

How can I get more information on a bill?

Your Assemblymember, Senator or the office of the bill’s author should be able to provide you with an analysis or fact sheet that summarizes the proposed new law. The Legislative Bill Room also provides printed copies of all legislation introduced during the current legislative session. Legislation from previous years is also available but must be ordered in advance. The Bill Room is located in the basement of the Capitol in Room B-32. The phone number is (916) 445-2323.

Can I visit my Assemblymember?

YES. Each Member has an office in the Capitol. It is best to call in advance for an appointment. Your Legislator also has staff assistants who can help you, if the Member is not available.

How do legislative assistants help?

Staff members perform many important tasks. Some work directly for individual Legislators; draft bills and assist constituents. Others work specifically for committees, providing analyses of pending legislation.

Can I testify before a Committee?

YES. Any person has the right to testify before a committee of the Legislature. Contact the bill’s author or your own Legislator to find out how to make your voice most effectively heard.

Where are legislators when they are not in the Capitol?

When not at the Capitol, Legislators are often in the district meeting with constituents. During recesses, policy committees often hold hearings throughout the State to gather testimony from those unable to come to Sacramento during regular session.

Assembly Standing Committees

Aging and Long Term Care	319-3990
Agriculture	319-2084
Appropriations	319-2081
Banking and Finance	319-3081
Budget	319-2099
Consumer Protection, Governmental Efficiency and Economic Development	319-2089
Education	319-2087
Elections, Reapportionment & Constitutional Amendments	319-2094
Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials	319-3965
Governmental Organization	319-2531
Health	319-2097
Higher Education	319-3960
Housing and Community Development	319-2085
Human Services	319-2247
Information Technology	319-3945
Insurance	319-2086
International Trade and Development	319-2090
Judiciary	319-2334
Labor and Employment	319-2091
Local Government	319-3958
Natural Resources	319-2092
Public Employees, Retirement and Social Security	319-3957
Public Safety	319-3744
Revenue and Taxation	319-2098
Rules	319-2800
Transportation	319-2093
Utilities and Commerce	319-2083
Veterans Affairs	319-2486
Water, Parks and Wildlife	319-2096

Senate Standing Committees

Agriculture and Water Resources	445-2206
Appropriations	445-3284
Budget and Fiscal Review	445-5202
Business and Professions	445-3435
Constitutional Amendments	445-2802
Education	445-2522
Elections and Reapportionment	445-2601
Energy, Utilities and Communications	445-9764
Environmental Quality	324-0894
Finance, Investment and International Trade	445-6306
Governmental Organization	445-1193
Health and Human Services	445-5965
Housing and Community Development	445-8740
Industrial Relations	445-1237
Insurance	445-0825
Judiciary	445-5957
Legislative Ethics	324-6929
Local Government	445-9748
Natural Resources and Wildlife	445-5441
Public Employment and Retirement	445-8958
Public Safety	322-1305
Revenue and Taxation	445-3808
Rules	445-4311
Transportation	445-3182
Veterans Affairs	445-5798

Joint Committees

Legislative Audit	445-8364
Legislative Budget	445-6767
Rules	445-2995

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